

Editorial

The Big Five as a Lens (and Its Limits) in Individual Differences and Everyday Life

Personality psychology offers a powerful framework for understanding why individuals differ in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors across diverse domains. The Big Five model, as articulated by McCrae and Costa (2008) remains one of the most influential approaches to conceptualizing these enduring traits. Yet, as the three contributions in this volume demonstrate, personality traits explain much, but not all, of human variability. Individual differences in adaptive functioning also depend on cognitive, affective, and metacognitive processes that interact dynamically with broad personality dispositions.

In this volume, *Individual Differences Research* brings together two reprints and one new contribution illustrating how the Big Five serves both as an interpretive lens in understanding a diversity of behavior and experience, but not without limits. The reprints begin with Livosky et al. (2012/2019). They examine how the Big Five relates to musical taste using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003) and the Short Test of Music Preferences–Revised (STOMP-R; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). The second reprint by Sturm and Bartels (2011/2019) explores how the Big Five, perceived justice, and affective dispositions predict an applicant’s intent to litigate in organizational contexts. Finally, in a new contribution, Kelly (2019) examines the relationship between an adaptive form of worry, the Big Five, and sleep disturbance ascribed to worry (SAW). Taken together, these investigations illustrate both the reach and the limitations of broad trait-based explanations, emphasizing that understanding adaptive functioning often hinges on processes not fully reducible to personality.

Personality and Everyday Expression

In their study of personality and music preferences, Livosky et al. (2012/2019) show that agreeableness was positively related to upbeat/conventional and energetic/rhythmic music and negatively associated with intense/rebellious genres. These findings align with earlier research by Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) and later by Nave et al. (2018), which demonstrated that music serves as an expressive medium for personality. Preferences for particular genres reflect not only emotional and aesthetic inclinations but also social motivations and self-concept. The study underscores how personality provides a framework for understanding individual differences in everyday domains such as artistic and cultural engagement.

Personality in Organizational Contexts

Sturm and Bartels (2011/2019) extend the lens to the workplace, examining how personality and perceived fairness interact to shape behavioral intentions. Their findings suggest that perceived justice and positive affectivity reduce an applicant's intent to litigate. This fits with broader evidence linking personality traits to reactions in personnel selection and evaluation contexts (McCarthy et al., 2017). Interestingly, the Big Five domains made little contribution to intent to litigate. On the other hand, the inclusion of affectivity added nuance and extended previous research, highlighting that while fairness perceptions are situational, they are filtered through enduring affective dispositions. This perspective encourages organizations to consider both structural and psychological dimensions of fairness: justice must not only be enacted but be *perceived* as such through the subjective lens of individual traits.

Beyond Traits: The Case of Normal Worry

Kelly (2019) challenges the assumption that worry is uniformly maladaptive. The study demonstrates that higher scores on “normal” worry, a goal-directed, manageable, and anticipatory form of cognition, predict lower worry-related sleep disturbance. Normal worry correlated positively with conscientiousness and negatively with neuroticism of the Big Five, mirroring its adaptive qualities, yet retained predictive power for lower SAW after controlling for personality and sleep deprivation. These results echo theoretical distinctions between adaptive and pathological worry (Davey, 1994) and provide evidence for incremental validity (Hunsley & Meyer, 2003). Normal worry may function as a metacognitive capacity distinct from the Big Five.

Integration: Traits, Contexts, and Processes

Across music, organizational justice, and sleep research, a consistent message emerges: personality traits structure broad tendencies, but contextual and process-oriented variables determine adaptive expression. Broad traits of the Big Five shape the *likelihood* of certain reactions, yet metacognitive and/or affective mechanisms, such as fairness perception or worry regulation, shape manifestations and actual occurrences of these tendencies. In this sense, personality operates less as a fixed determinant than as a framework for *potential* adaptation.

At a broader theoretical level, these findings encourage a balanced view of individual differences, one that appreciates the Big Five and other broad personality domains as unifying taxonomies but remains attentive to the dynamic and situational nature of self-regulation. The present volume demonstrates how enduring dispositions interface with specific cognitive and emotional systems to yield the diverse patterns that define individual difference research. In doing so, it affirms that while broad-domain personality might provide the lens through which we view behavior, the full picture also depends on the unique, context-sensitive processes through which individuals navigate their inner and outer worlds.

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